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March 21, 2003

Chief, Standardization Branch
Livestock and Seed Program, AMS
United States Department of Agriculture
Room 2603-S, Stop 0254
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0254.

Re: Docket Number LS-02-02
Proposed changes in minimum standards for Livestock and Meat Marketing claims that can be used on food products

Dear USDA:

Production claims on food cartons are extremely important to consumers who wish to purchase products that both support and reflect their values regarding the humane treatment of animals. It is only ingenuous and acceptable, therefore, that these claims should indicate truthfully the measure of humane treatment the animals received while being raised for food. I urge you to support only *accurate* claims that *specifically state how the animal was treated.*

The production claims currently allowed are too broad and often misleading, allowing the industry to abuse customer concerns by dishonestly taking advantage of consumers who are genuinely concerned about the welfare of animals. While there is absolutely nothing wrong with the industry wishing to focus on the growing consumer concern for animal welfare, to do so at the expense of that very welfare is not only unacceptable but deplorable as well.

If the industry wishes to boost profits via the use of animal welfare claims, then it is only just that they back those claims with integrity. Certainly there is no just cause for vagary in proposed claims reflecting definitions that are subject to varied and misleading interpretations. In this manner the industry is purposefully abusing both consumer and animal interests for their own gain, and that is unacceptable. As a concerned consumer, I call upon the USDA to be an advocate for fellow consumers, supporting claims that are accurate, specific, and meaningful to consumers and supporters of animal welfare.

Please make the following changes in the proposed Livestock and Meat Marketing Claims.

Free Range and Pasture Raised Claims:
1) Allow the terms "free range" and "pasture raised" to be used, but only if the definition is amended to read "livestock that have had continuous and unconfined access to pasture from birth to harvest."

2) Do not allow the term "free roaming" or any derivative of the term to be used, as this term is often used to describe conditions where animals are raised in barns or buildings. Although the animals are not in a pen, crate or cage, and are able to "roam freely" within the confined area, they do not have access to the outdoors. Since this term is already being used incorrectly to purposefully mislead consumers, it should be eliminated from the proposed list of marketing claims.

Antibiotic Use in Food Animals:

1) Allow only the claims "no antibiotics used" or " raised without antibiotics" within the proposed definition "Livestock have never received antibiotics from birth to harvest."

2) Do not allow the use of the claim "no subtherapeutic antibiotics use" since the definition of subtherapeutic has not been approved by the USDA, the FDA or other federal agencies. As such, this term is open to enormous abuse by the industry, which will lead to customer confusion.

3) Do not allow use of the term "not fed antibiotics," which can easily be confused with the phrase "raised without antibiotics." Since antibiotics can be administered to animals in other ways other than food, this terminology is subject to abuse by producers and will lead to consumer confusion.

Grass Fed Claims:

1) Support the definition that reads "Grass, green or range pasture or forage shall be 100% of the primary energy source throughout the animal's life cycle" as opposed to "80%" since the latter currently applies to all cattle raised for beef, including those who are finished on corn in a feedlot.

Thank you for your time and consideration on behalf of consumers.

Regards,

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