



CORNUCOPIA
I N S T I T U T E

Charlotte Vallaeys
The Cornucopia Institute
PO Box 126
Cornucopia, WI 54827

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Docket Clerk
Naturally Raised Marketing Claim
Room 2607-S, AMS, USDA
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, DC 20250-0254

Re: Docket No. AMS-LS-07-0131; LS-07-16

Federal Register: November 28, 2007: Volume 72, Number 228, Page 67266-67268

Dear USDA Agricultural Marketing Service:

The Cornucopia Institute believes that the current proposed regulation lacks certain criteria that many consumers would expect from a “naturally-raised” claim, and may put smaller producers who are currently raising their livestock in a “natural” way at a competitive disadvantage.

The proposed standard is silent on animal welfare issues; yet for many consumers, a “naturally-raised” label on meats and animal products implies that the animals’ welfare and needs were respected. We believe that many consumers seeking a “naturally-raised” animal product expect the animals to have been granted the ability to exhibit certain behaviors that are considered “natural,” such as stretching legs and wings, adequate space for moving around, and grazing on pasture for cows and cattle. The ability to exhibit these behaviors, considered to be so basic to the “nature” of these animals, is rendered impossible in current confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Yet meat and products from these CAFO-raised animals would currently qualify for the “naturally-raised” label, and we therefore urge AMS to include animal welfare standards in the criteria for eligibility for the “naturally-raised” claim.

We understand that animal welfare standards are complicated and at times controversial, and that the development of acceptable standards may take time. However, we believe that outright ignoring animal welfare standards in “naturally-raised” standards is profoundly misleading to consumers and detrimental to efforts at improving animal welfare.

Moreover, the “naturally-raised” claim as it is currently proposed would allow livestock producers to feed animals a particularly “unnatural” diet yet still qualify for the “naturally-raised” claim—again misleading consumers. The natural diet of ruminants—dairy cows and beef cattle—consists of grasses and hay, not the corn and soybean diet that CAFOs currently feed these animals. Moreover, genetically engineered corn and soybeans make up the majority of these animals’ diet. There is nothing “natural” about corn and soybeans that have been genetically engineered in a lab to withstand certain pesticides or acquire pesticidal properties. Allowing these grains to make up the diet of animals that have evolved to eat grasses and hay is extremely misleading to consumers. Genetically engineered feed should be prohibited under the “naturally-raised” standards.

By allowing animals that were packed in the unnatural conditions of CAFOs and fed the unnatural diets consisting of genetically engineered corn and soybeans to be considered “naturally-raised,” The Cornucopia Institute feels that the USDA is allowing big business to co-opt a term that belongs to farmers who are truly concerned with raising their livestock in a way that is natural, by considering environmental sustainability and animal welfare. The proposed standard would allow CAFO operators to “capture value added opportunities” by misleading consumers and putting ethical farmers at a disadvantage by capturing a share of their market.

There are other ways in which The Cornucopia Institute fears that industry and unscrupulous marketers will co-opt the “naturally-raised” claim from smaller livestock producers. If there is a fee system associated with the approval of the “naturally-raised” claim, we urge that it be implemented in a way that will not put smaller producers at a competitive disadvantage. Without a “progressive” fee system, large meatpacking concerns will have a demonstrably lower cost per unit to meet the auditing standards, which will competitively handicap smaller producers.

In addition, The Cornucopia Institute urges AMS to change the prohibition of using “mammalian and avian by-products” to prohibiting “mammalian and avian *slaughter* by-products.” Many smaller producers who pasture their animals use certain by-products, such as egg shells, whey, and dairy products to supplement the feed of pastured animals. If the proposed rule goes into effect and these products are prohibited, these producers will not be able to use the “naturally-raised claim” and will be put at a severe disadvantage.

The Cornucopia Institute urges AMS to consider our concerns and adopt a final rule that:

1. Includes animal welfare standards, such as access to the outdoors and minimum pasture/hay requirements for ruminants.
2. Prohibits genetically engineered feed.
3. Has a progressive fee system, so as to avoid putting smaller producers at a competitive disadvantage.
4. Changes the prohibition of “mammalian and avian by-products” to “mammalian and avian *slaughter* by-products” to allow the use of egg shells, whey and dairy products in the production of livestock.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Vallaey

Charlotte Vallaey
Farm and Food Policy Analyst
The Cornucopia Institute
978-369-6409