



The Delicious Truth

“I like mine with lettuce and tomatoes, Heinz 57 and French fried potatoes.” These famous words from the Jimmy Buffet song, Cheeseburger in Paradise, embody the concept of one of the most traditional American meals: the cheeseburger. However, one news story may change the tradition.

In late April, the wholesomeness and safety of the traditional American meal was challenged by a video produced by celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver, on the ABC network. A common additive to ground beef, lean finely textured beef, was deemed unfit for human consumption by the chef, and he gave it the slang name ‘pink slime’.

That name caused uproar across the nation, said Dr. Mark Miller, a meat science professor at Texas Tech University, because of the negative word usage.

“The name pink slime has a negative feeling that goes with it,” said Miller, expert on lean finely textured beef. “Nobody wants to think that they are really eating slime.”

Many consumers stopped eating products that contained lean finely textured beef because they thought it was unsafe for their families to consume. Pink slime is added to most ground beef batches to make it leaner and have less fat, which adds to its nutritional value.

“All beef eaters will feel the impact and the economy will continue to suffer.”

According to the American Meat Institute, lean finely textured beef is 90% lean muscle tissue and is has 20% less calories than ground beef by itself. Basically, lean finely textured beef makes the batch of ground beef more nutritious.

The main reason people were afraid to eat lean finely textured beef is because of the trace amounts of chemicals found in it. In the video, Oliver doused the ground beef with everyday kitchen cleaners that contain ammonium hydroxide to illustrate that the meat possessed chemicals.

Tyler Chaney, a M.S. student in personal finance, was shocked by the pink slime news because he was uncertain of what exactly is in the food he eats.

"I don't really know a lot about this pink slime stuff," Chaney said. "I hear it on the news and it seems to always have a negative connotation."

Lorelei Day, journalism major from San Angelo, Texas, did not grow up with a background in agriculture and she expressed similar concerns.

"I don't feel comfortable about eating ground beef right now," Day said. "Even if there is a small chance of having chemicals in my body, I am not willing to risk it."

Day's opinion reflects a growing trend among many consumers who are becoming skeptical of all the food that we eat.

"It's scary to think about other foods that could have harmful substances in them," Day said. "Pink slime definitely doesn't sound appealing to me."

The truth is, adding a chemical to the food is a very popular process that increases the safety of the product.

"Only a small amount of ammonium hydroxide is added to the batch as a safety step to kill bacteria," Miller said. "It is also used in bread and cheese processing."

Research lab assistant and sophomore animal science student, Christy Woerner, interned for Safeway Foods and has seen the stringent safety implications firsthand.

"Ground beef is under the strictest rules and is one of the most watched meat products," Woerner said.

She acknowledged that it did not make sense for ground beef companies to add ingredients that would be detrimental to the consumers.

"I have complete faith that the companies do not want to hurt the consumers," Woerner said. "The consumers are how these companies pay their bills, so keeping the customer is safe is a priority."

So, Americans really have nothing to worry about, right? Wrong.

Because of the controversy of "pink slime," three beef processing plants have been closed down and over 800 workers have lost their jobs, according the American Meat Science Association. The lack of lean finely texture beef will cause a spike in the prices of beef.

"Next year, we will have to slaughter 1.4 million more head of cattle to replace the loss of lean finely textured beef," Miller said. "We will have a significant dependence on the use of more foreign beef."

Consumers are leery of the inevitable rise in prices and it may hurt the beef and agriculture industries.

"I don't like that the prices will go up," Chaney said. "Nobody wants to pay more for something that used to be cheap. It could cause people to stop buying the ground beef products."

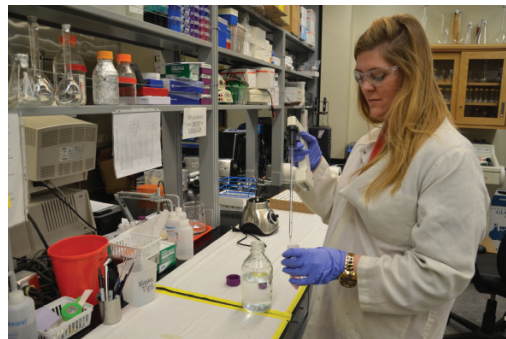
In the upcoming months, increasing prices are expected to continue. The wallets of consumers across America will feel the impact of the lack of lean finely textured beef.

"All beef eaters will feel the impact," Miller said, "and the economy will continue to suffer."

This is where education comes into play. Miller said it is the job of farmers and ranchers across the United States to learn the facts about

lean finely textured beef and educate as many people as possible. He is encouraged that more consumers will look for the truth of lean finely textured beef and begin to see it as a wholesome, cost-effective protein source that is in our burgers.

"People should continue to eat products that have lean finely textured beef in them," Miller said. "It is healthy and safe for them to consume."



Christy Woerner, sophomore animal science student works in the Texas Tech Animal Science Lab.