Warren Analytical Laboratory

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FSIS Docket Room
Docket # 00-026R
Room 102, Cotton Annex Building
300 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20250-3700

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Michael Aaronson

To Whom It May Concern:

On August 6, 2001, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) issued a notice, "Residue Policy." According to the notice, "FSIS intends to modify it approach to testing and disposition of carcasses for violative residues to be more consistent with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). FSIS regulations regarding residues state that, "Animal drug residues are permitted in meat food products if such residues are from drugs which have been approved by the FDA and any such drug residues are within tolerance levels approved by the FDA." Specifically, FSIS has condemned only the organ with a violative residue level and has conducted a laboratory analysis of the muscle tissue to determine whether the muscle portion of the carcass can be salvaged. Historically, if no drug residue was detected in the muscle, FSIS released the muscle portion of the carcass for human consumption.

ConAgra Beef Company and Swift & Company have reviewed the notice and are concerned about the issues it raises. We are dedicated to providing safe products to consumers. This notice, however, will not enhance the public health; it only serves to harm entities that are not responsible for the presence of inappropriate drug residue levels in animals used for food. Specifically, the notice would abandon longstanding and effective agency practices, harming packers without benefiting the safety of the food supply (the practice of destroying just the organ with the residue violation and not the entire carcass). Moreover, the notice conflicts with the standards established by Codex Alimentarius, a conflict that could adversely affect ConAgra's international trade capacity. Packers essentially do not have the option of buying animals that have been prescreened for drugs; therefore, the notice will adversely affect the livestock and meat industries with no appreciable public benefit (cost implications resulting from the additional carcass condemnations).

Our livestock suppliers are required to participate in the Pork QualityAssurance Program developed by the National Pork Producers Council. This provides procedures for proper and judicious use of drugs and helps to assure that violative residue levels would not be present at time of marketing the animals. This is verified through random testing at our plants for animals from different producers.

Data from the 1999 National Residue Monitoring Program shows that out of 7,343 monitoring samples for residues, 87 (1.2%) violations were found in animals from all slaughter classes, that horses accounted for 47 (54%) of the violations, resulting in 40 (0.5%) violations for the remaining slaughter classes.

Changing the residue policy as proposed is unwarranted. FSIS should consider the potential impact that this policy will have on the industry, international trade, consumer, and ask how the public and the industry will benefit from a change in policy? Changing policy to mirror FDA's outdated or incomplete regulatory system is inappropriate in this case.

Sincerely,

Michael Aaronson, Ph.D.
Vice President, Analytical Services
ConAgra Beef Company