

Is The Wax Coating On Cheese Considered Tare?

By David Sefcik

Recently, we have received calls from several States asking if the wax coating on certain kinds of cheeses should be considered as tare or net weight. Good questions!

Some may argue that although the wax is not consumed, it may be an integral part of the manufacturing of the cheese and there are cases where cheese that is sold wholesale, by weight, has included the weight of the wax.

The issue of wax on cheese came up in 1984 and we asked the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), for guidance. In a March 20, 1984 letter, the FDA Associate Director for Compliance at the time, Taylor Quinn, provided the following interpretation:

“We are of the opinion that 21 CFR 101.105(g) requires that wax coatings on cheese always be considered part of the tare. This section states that the declaration of quantity of contents shall accurately reveal the quantity of food in the package exclusive of wrappers and other material packed therewith.

Even when the wax is an integral part of the manufacture of the cheese, the wax itself is not derived from the curd of any type of milk. As a result, it would be inappropriate to consider the wax to be part of the food known as cheese.

Also, most consumers would consider such wax inedible and would discard it. Under these circumstances, we believe that consumers would be misled by declarations of net weight including the wax coating.

Further, you should be aware that our position on these wax coatings applies to wholesale as well as retail cheese packages. Both types of packages could be considered misbranded if the net weight declaration included the wax coating.”

Clearly, wax on cheese is to be considered tare! This interpretation still holds true today.

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