



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Food Safety  
and Inspection  
Service

Washington, D.C.  
20250

APR 16 2004

Mr. Cato R. Fiksdal  
President  
California Agricultural Commissioners  
and Sealers Association  
12300 Lower Azusa Road  
Arcadia, California 91006-5872

Dear Mr. Fiksdal:

Thank you for your February 19, 2004, letter to Secretary Ann Veneman regarding the net weight determination of federally-inspected, case-ready meat and poultry products labeled as enhanced and/or marinated with solutions. Secretary Veneman appreciates your comments and has asked that I provide you with additional information on this issue.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the public health agency responsible for ensuring that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled. FSIS enforces the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, and the Egg Products Inspection Act, which require Federal inspection and regulation of meat, poultry, and processed egg products prepared for distribution in commerce for use as human food.

In your letter, you provided language regarding the labeling of "fresh meat products in a marinade solution" and you attribute this language to the FSIS Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff (LCPS). We would like to point out that the language you provided is not from FSIS. The language was taken directly from a letter issued by the State of California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). We would like to take this opportunity to resolve any confusion associated with this issue and provide you with additional information on FSIS labeling requirements.

First, as you know, net weight is applied to the labeling of most products at Federal establishments prior to the distribution of products in commerce. States have a function to check net weight of consumer packages at retail. Mr. Roger Macey, an official with the CDFA, wrote to Dr. Robert Post, Director of LCPS, in August 2003, to seek advice on whether it is appropriate to apply the moisture loss allowance for poultry, as provided in the NIST Handbook 133 - 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, to similarly processed fresh poultry and meat products, particularly those products injected with a solution. The NIST guidelines state that a standard exists for a 3 percent moisture loss allowance for packages of fresh poultry, franks, hotdogs, bacon, fresh sausage, and luncheon meats.

Mr. Cato R. Fiksdal

Page 2

Based on advice from NIST, FSIS sent a response to CDFA stating that it would be appropriate to apply the standard for the moisture loss allowance for packages of fresh poultry (i.e., 3 percent) to fresh meat products injected with a solution. The FSIS advice was not intended to infer or establish a policy on the method of net weight compliance verification; it was only intended to provide an opinion that the 3 percent allowance could apply to meat products in addition to poultry products. Moreover, the Agency's net weight labeling compliance regulations (9 CFR 317.19, and 381.121(a) and (b)) incorporate by reference NIST Handbook 133 as providing the appropriate procedures to be followed for determining net weight labeling compliance. Therefore, in regard to the appropriate method of determining net weight compliance, we would like to note that FSIS policies have not changed. FSIS continues to depend on the NIST guidance to determine net weight labeling compliance.

In addition, because the August 2003 letter from CDFA did not address questions about how "enhanced" products are labeled or what constitutes product versus packaging, it is also possible that the appropriate method of determining net weight compliance is linked to confusion about what enhanced products are, how they are labeled, and whether or not the added solutions are intended to be part of the labeled net weight.

As you know, products containing flavoring, seasoning, and tenderizing solutions that have been incorporated by injecting, massaging, and/or tumbling, have been marketed for many years. The Agency's policies on raw bone-in poultry, boneless poultry, and uncooked red meat products containing added solutions, as well as meat products with added solutions used in secondary products, have been in existence for over two decades. The policies are based on labeling regulations governing product identity (9 CFR 317.2(e) and 381.117) and require that the labels of products into which solutions are injected, or into which meat and poultry are placed, bear a prominent and conspicuous statement as part of the product name. The specific ingredients in the solution may be part of the product name or may be listed in the ingredients statement on the label. Examples of such products are "boneless turkey breast containing up to 15% of a solution," "beef strip loin steak enhanced with up to 10% of a solution," and "pork chop flavored with 20% teriyaki sauce." Furthermore, it has been longstanding FSIS policy that labels on raw, enhanced meat and poultry products packaged with free-flowing solutions or sauces must contain such phrases as, "beef in barbecue sauce" and "turkey thighs in lemon pepper marinade solution."

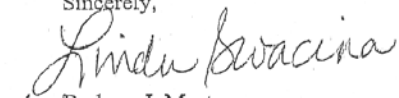
Therefore, in the case of enhanced products, the solutions that are added to the meat or poultry or into which the meat or poultry are placed for flavoring, seasoning, and tenderizing, are intended to be part of the product. The solutions are identified as part of the product names of enhanced products, whether the solution is incorporated into the product or is free-flowing, it is considered part of the product. As such, it is expected that the labeled net weight applied at the Federal establishment represents essentially the weight of the product minus the packaging. This view is further supported by the fact that if the added solution is not intended to be consumed or is intended to be strictly a packing medium, according to Agency regulations (9 CFR 317.8(b)(17)), the product labeling needs to bear a statement to that effect.

Mr. Cato R. Fiksdal  
Page 3

We hope that you find this information helpful. If you need additional information about  
~~this issue or any other food labeling policy issues, we encourage you to contact~~  
Dr. Robert Post, Director, LCPS, at (202) 205-0279.

Thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

  
for Barbara J. Masters  
Acting Administrator