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Former IU Dean Gets at Meat of the Problem

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Herald Times

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Former IU dean gets at meat of the problem

The name of a former Indiana University School of Law dean popped up in a rather tasteless story recently.

The story, from The Associated Press, was about a regulatory squabble concerning the use of salvaged meat and bone chips in hot dogs, bologna, sausage and other such food items.

Former IU Dean S. Jay Plager, now the administrator of information and regulatory affairs in the federal Office of Management and Budget, is the good guy in the dispute.

The controversy began with an Agriculture Department proposal to allow meat packers to include as much as 10 percent "mechanically separated meat" or MSM, in products without telling the public.

MSM is created when animal remnants, already scraped by hand, are fed into mechanical separators which retrieve all the remaining meat and tissue; as well as a certain amount of bone, which is about the size of ground pepper after going through the grinder.

"The Agriculture Department, echoing industry sentiments, claims consumers won't purchase.

See Leonard, page A10

Ex-dean gets at problem

Leonard, from page A3.

meat labeled that it contains MSM, despite the American Meat Institute assertion the products are "as safe and wholesome as the species from which it is derived."

Plager, in a letter to the department, argued that the proposal "does not appear to be consistent with several of the administration's basic principles. Nor does it appear that the potential benefits to society of this regulation outweigh the potential cost to society."

"So we also provide consumers with more, rather than less, information about food products so that they may reach informed market decisions."

"It would probably be a good idea to require hot dog and lunch meat producers to put on their labels the actual content of their "meat products." You've heard people bring this up before, and you probably said, "Don't tell me."

"Let's just say they use of the parts of the animal that they can't possibly use elsewhere. Parts you would never, never eat if you thought about it."

"It doesn't seem that we should want to add ground bone to that already unsavory mix. The USDA is accepting public comment until Nov. 8 on the proposal to allow MSM without labels."

If the Bloomington High School...