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Former IU Dean Gets at Meat of the Problem

Mike Leonard

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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 it.

Ex-dean gets at problem

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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.”

Plager wrote: “Furthermore, if one accepts the assertion that some consumers would be reluctant to purchase a product that they know to contain (MSM), why should this information be omitted from the label? We must 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 the parts of the animal that they can 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 Class of 1938 is any indicator, we’ll be saying “President Bush” for the next four years.

At the class’s 50th reunion in late August, a straw poll showed Republican George Bush an easy 53-34 winner over challenger Michael Dukakis.

Is it a valid prognostication? “You never know,” said Sue Schmalz, one of the pollsters. “I think we had a pretty good cross-section of the older community.”

Penguin ice cream magnate Arch Turner thought it was a snow job in the first place.

But Turner changed the name of the Penguin’s Blizzard to Blizzard a couple of years ago after learning that Dairy Queen had copyrighted the name in the 1940s. And while he doesn’t believe it was a coincidence that DQ pulled the name off the shelf two years ago with a product very similar to his own super-thick shake, he nonetheless warded off a DQ challenge that the Penguin had copied its invention.

Now Dairy Queen has gone after the huge liquor company, Heublein, for introducing a lime-and-whiskey drink called the Blizzard. Dairy Queen sued Heublein in August, claiming that the reputation of its ice cream Blizzard might be damaged by Heublein’s liquor drink.

If anything, any confusion might help Dairy Queen’s sales.

But at any rate, the word blizzard is hardly a DQ invention. Nor is its super-thick shake, to which cookies, candy bars, granola and other items can be added.

We in Bloomington knew that a long time ago.