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Y! Big Story: Pink slime and other food fights

By Vera H-C Chan | Trending Now - 12 hrs ago

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As if [dirty chicken coops](#), [salmonella-tainted peanut butter](#), and [melamine in pet food](#) weren't enough, along comes "pink slime."

Pink slime—as some call it but known in the meat industry as [lean finely textured beef](#)—isn't illegal or even [new](#). What the ruckus about it reveals is the distrust consumers have about food safety, even as they become more educated. Disagreements over the degree of government intervention aside, more state and federal laws are coming into effect now to protect and improve our food supplies (among them the [Food Safety Modernization Act](#) and [The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#)).



LFTB ground beef

The latest rounds in the food fights—in the beef industry and beyond—have revived arguments over disclosure, and the trade-off between food safety and the use of chemical additives in food production. And these days, the fights are getting more heated.

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The Upton Sinclair effect. America has kept a keen eye on the meat industry ever since "The Jungle" published in 1906. The muckraker-author set out to expose working-class immigrants' grinding poverty and upper class corruption. Instead, details about spoiled meat, unsanitary conditions, and bodies falling into the lard machine grossed people out so much, the [Pure Food and Drug Act](#) and the [Meat Inspection Act](#) passed within a year.

More than 100 years later, people are still trying to figure out what's in meat, as well as in poultry, fruit, dairy, and just about anything we put in our mouths. Works like "[Fast-Food Nation](#)," "[My Year of Meats](#)," "[Food, Inc.](#)," "[Super Size Me](#)," "[The Omnivore's Dilemma](#)," and "[In Defense of Food](#)" have focused on where food comes from, how we process and deliver, and the amounts we consume. Throw in high-profile recalls, small-farm focus, multinational globalization, rise of organics, locavore movement, obesity campaign, and sugar toxicity: All this has given people much to chew on.

Nearly three-quarters of consumers are more concerned about food safety vs. five years ago, according to a [Deloitte 2011 Consumer Food and Product Insights Survey](#). This represents a jump of eight percentage points since the same survey was conducted in 2011. (Oct 4, 2011, [Sun-Sentinel](#))

More proof of culinary insecurity:

When it comes to food, consumers value safety and affordability above all else, but their confidence in food safety is slipping, according to a new survey by the industry-backed Center for Food Integrity.. Survey results showed a [seven percent] drop in agreement with the statement: "I have access to all of the information I want about where my food comes from, how it is produced and its safety." ...CFI said this drop shows the industry is "not connecting with consumers in a way that is meaningful to them." (Oct. 11, 2011, [Food Safety News](#))

How a private email led to this latest food fight. Lean finely textured beef (LFTB) doesn't sound so bad, but a microbiologist's way with words—coupled with a [celebrity chef's outrage](#)—caused nationwide revulsion, hamburger chains to take out [full-page ads](#) disclaiming all slime-age, and meat-processing companies' [bankruptcies and plant closures](#).

Microbiologist Gerald Zirnstein had intended his phrase in an email, "nasty pink slime," only for fellow scientists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A disgusted Zirnstein, who inspected the [Beef Products, Inc.](#) (BPI), had been upset that its trimmings had been approved for the consumer market.

The email was later released to the New York Times as part of a Freedom of Information request for a [2009 investigative article on food safety](#). The newspaper article mentioned the slime reference in passing. "Nobody did anything (about pink slime). USDA dropped the ball again. The meat industry soft sold it," said Zirnstein, who left USDA and took a

<http://t.co/2PIDvbXY>

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job as an industry consultant but now is unemployed. The issue got renewed life when British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, who advocates for American children to eat healthier food, devoted an episode of his television show to the topic in April last year. (March 26, [Reuters](#))

[More »](#)

His colleagues had their own nicknames:

We originally called it soylent pink," [retired microbiologist Carl] Custer told The Daily. "We looked at the product and we objected to it because it used connective tissues instead of muscle. It was simply not nutritionally equivalent [to ground beef]. My main objection was that it was not meat." ...Despite voicing his concerns to other officials at the food inspection service, however, the USDA ruled that Lean Beef Trimmings were safe. "The word in the office was that undersecretary [of agriculture] JoAnn Smith pushed it through, and that was that," Custer said. (March 5, [The Daily](#))

The meat industry, for its part, has [created a page explaining the practice](#), made possible decades ago thanks to a new technology. (A 2008 [BPI webpage](#) describes meat going through de-sinewing, centrifugal force, and a "PH enhancement process.") The fight got political: The Iowa governor decried the pink slime "[smear campaign](#)" and promised a [Congressional investigation](#). "If they get by with this," he declared, "what food product is next?"



Beef processing tour

The beef with (lean finely textured) beef. Companies have lined up to announce that they either never had carried or would stop carrying LFTB. (See chart below.) The USDA decreed that schools, the largest focus of [chef Oliver's outrage](#) captured in his now-canceled show "Food Revolution," could opt out of buying it for kids' lunches.

A [former undersecretary of agriculture](#) and industry consultant has defended the practice—and underscored the great divide between farm and table.

"If consumers and restaurants are up in arms about the use of ammonia and can potentially drive a company out of business by their actions, I can only wonder what they are going to do when they look at the other chemicals in use to try and protect us from foodborne illnesses, chemicals like liquid chlorine and lactic acid just to name a couple," said [Dr. Richard] Raymond. "There are just certain unpleasant realities of how meat is processed in this country. Those of us with farm backgrounds maybe can accept them a little more readily than someone who has led a life sheltered from these realities." (Jan. 6, [Food Safety News](#))

What does ammonia hydroxide do? The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, which inspects meat, poultry and eggs,

outlines approved chemical treatments, like the injection of ammonia hydroxide. That practice has been around for decades.



Lean finely textured beef frozen on a drum

[T]he product receives a puff of ammonia to eliminate bacteria safely and effectively. When combined with moisture naturally in beef, ammonium hydroxide is formed, which is a naturally occurring compound found in many foods including baked goods, cheese, chocolate, and puddings, in our own bodies and the environment. It is used in the production of each of these foods as a processing aid and not an ingredient, so not "on the label" of those foods either. It is safe and has been approved by FDA since 1974 and specifically approved for its food safety benefits in beef processing since 2001. (*BeefisBeef*, a BPI blog)

Fatty trimmings, Reuters explains, "are more susceptible to contamination than other cuts of beef" and need the ammonia to kill pathogens like salmonella and E.coli. Bear in mind, the zapped trimmings (usually about 15 percent of the ground beef) doesn't make the overall beef safer. The chemical is accepted in many goods, "according to the General Standards for Food Additives set forth by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a group funded by the World Health Organization and the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization."

Naming names in labels. Not everyone is so sanguine over a "puff." Some call for a ban, others just want disclosure. A Maine congresswoman proposed the Requiring Easy and Accurate Labeling of Beef Act (REAL Beef Act).

Just Label It is another movement demanding food transparency. A "record-breaking one-million public comments" signed a petition requiring genetically engineered food be labeled. The Center for Food Safety, which submitted the petition in March, noted that nearly 50 countries require labeling, and in the past year 36 bills "dealing with the labeling of genetically engineered foods have been introduced" in 19 states.

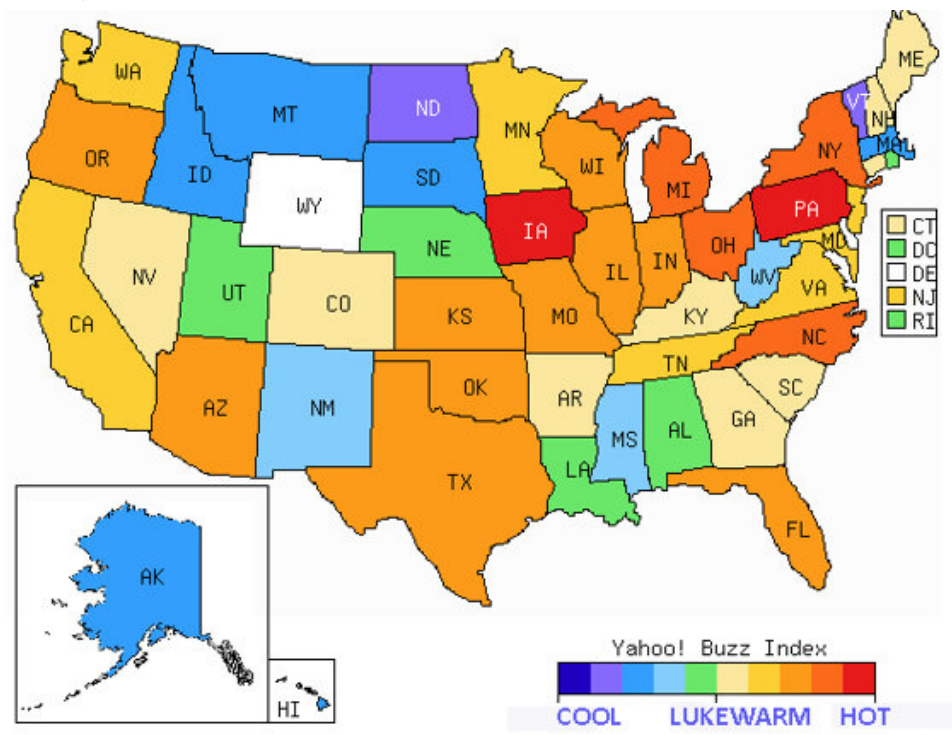
A partial list of outlets free of lean finely textured beef (aka pink slime)

Chain restaurants	Supermarkets
Burger King	A&P (never carried)
McDonald's	CostCo (never carried)
Taco Bell	H.E.B.
Wendy's (ran ads that said it never carried ammoniated beef)	Kroger's
	Food Lion (Blooms, Harvey's, Reid's)

Gerrity's
Giant Eagle
Publix
Redner's Warehouse Market
Safeway (Genuardi's, Dominicks)
Sam's Club
Supervalu (Acme, Albertsons, Cub
Foods, Farm Fresh, Hornbacher's,
Jewel-Osco, Lucky, Shaw's/Star Market,
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Weis
Wegmans (will phase out)
Whole Foods

Search sampling: *ground beef pink slime, jamie oliver pink slime, kroger pink lime, pink slime in hamburger, pink slime in beef, pink slime in school lunches, pink slime petition, rick perry pink slime, walmart pink slime, what is pink slime?, pink slime bankruptcy, does walmart use pink slime, is pink slime in ground turkey, usda pink slime, mcdonald's pink slime chicken, wendy's pink slime, wegmen's pink slime, does kroger use pink slime, pink slime photos, costco pink slime, does burger king use pink slime, HEB pink slime, BPI pink slime, Meijer pink slime, FDA pink slime*

A "Pink Slime" Search Map, past 30 days



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Jim R • [Hopkinsville, Kentucky](#) • 1 hr 1 min ago

27 0

Last I heard, the law and regulation makers were still human - and susceptible to the lure of Dead Presidents. I firmly believe that if the 'Law Makers' were required to eat what they approve, and have the level of medical attention and the cost of living that they approve for others - we'd see a... [More](#)

[▶ 2 Replies](#)

Paul B And Sue B • [Salem, Oregon](#) • 1 hr 23 mins ago

20 0

what's the old saying? what you don't know, won't hurt you. the motto of american corporate

business.....

▶ 1 Reply

Capt. Jean Lafitte • 24 mins ago

6   0

The food industry does not want us to become savvy consumers.. Profit overall..

▶ Reply

David Green • Warminster, Pennsylvania • 1 hr 35 mins ago

27   0

happyness is knowing where your food come from. Buy Fresh Buy Local - it always tastes better.

▶ 1 Reply

Tim • 52 mins ago

16   0

Congressman to public schools: "This is FDA approved food that is safe. We've all got to tighten our belts and pitch in to help the economy." Congressman to his wife: "Honey, pack OUR children's lunch just in case our private school tries serving that slime."

▶ 1 Reply

Dave Near St. Louis • Germantown, Maryland • 49 mins ago

14   0

Time to remember our Grandparents' pre-WalMart wisdom: Know your Butcher.

▶ 1 Reply

JaneD • Tulsa, Oklahoma • 54 mins ago

8   0

Grow what you can yourself. Fruits and vegetables can be integrated into your landscape in attractive ways. My husband and I have been raising a few steers and pigs each year for many years now. We use only the highest quality feed. No hormones or antibiotcs (to rapidly enhance growth). We treat... [More](#)

▶ 7 Replies

Slanacastle • Tampa, Florida • 1 min 11 secs ago

0   0

I refuse to ear meat,fruit or veggies purchased at my Grocers(grossers.LOL)and buy my meat from the local meat market,fresh cut,ground as YOU ask for and mosey accross the street to the farmers market for MY fruits and veggies(when I don't get them free-see #3).#1.I save about 45% on the cost of... [More](#)

▶ 1 Reply

Sick Of Govnt BS • 3 mins 7 secs ago

2   0

Community led and run food production, gardens, livestock, dairy. Better known as a co-op. Those who work it, eat it, and those who don't have to pay for it. Grow and buy local is the only way to push high priced grocery stores back into their proper position, push the chemical production companies... [More](#)

[▶ Reply](#)

[Peanuts](#) • [Wichita, Kansas](#) • 24 mins ago

6   0

People have the right to know what is in their food.

[▶ Reply](#)

[Colt](#) • [Boise, Idaho](#) • 1 hr 35 mins ago

11   0

AS a kid growing up on a 200 acre farm, we raised our own food. We killed our own chickens and ate them, butchered our own beef and pork that we raised, ate the corn and beans that we raised in the fields where my dad hauled and spread the manure from the barn. NEVER

[▶ Reply](#)

[David T](#) • 35 mins ago

10   0

Just label it properly and let the consumer decide.

[▶ Reply](#)

[Bret C](#) • [Riverside, California](#) • 1 min 7 secs ago

0   0

The line "approved by FDA" has been used so many times in so many ways that it is meaningless. Heck, the Feds approved asbestos as safe. The Feds approved DDT as safe. How many time will it have to take for people to WAKE UP and realize that the Federal government does NOT care about we the people.... [More](#)

[▶ Reply](#)

[Kate](#) • [Columbus, Ohio](#) • 12 mins ago

4   0

This is exactly why we buy a cow from a family owned farm and send it to the butcher, our meat smells different taste and even cooks without any grease. Way better than anything else anywhere else!

[▶ 1 Reply](#)

[Arthur](#) • [Hilliard, Ohio](#) • 3 mins 9 secs ago

1   0

Ammonia Hydroxide, then we wonder why cancer rates increase. You know if the industry has to make money off this they should sell it to dog food manufacturers!

[▶ Reply](#)

John • Camden, New Jersey • 6 mins ago

0   0

Yet, who says anything about corn-fed cattle? Corn is not a natural food for cows and they have to be given antibiotics in order to tolerate/digest the corn. Feeding them the corn results in higher Omega 6, which renders the Omega 3 as useless (any wonder why we are so short on our Omega 3's?)... [More](#)

[▶ Reply](#)

Andrea Moulton • Ithaca, New York • 10 mins ago

2   0

I like how the article is slanted and talks about how ammonia is protecting us from bacteria. It is not about protecting our food supply it is about the meat industry feeding us the nastiest mix of tainted garbage, making it look like meat, minimizing risk and making a huge profit by tricking us... [More](#)

[▶ Reply](#)

GMO • Chicago, Illinois • 12 mins ago

4   0

This article could be re-written under the title "We do not trust the government to keep us safe!" Our government tacitly operates in collusion with big business via our corrupt congress. Lobbyists and PACS and other clandestine operatives seek to OWN senators and representatives, and largely they... [More](#)

[▶ Reply](#)

JoeM • Alexandria, Louisiana • 15 mins ago

3   0

I'll bet the same people that are dead set against having the "pink slime" added to their beef are among the many who either eat or at least feed those famous "chicken nuggets" to their kids. Maybe they don't know what they are made of.

[▶ 1 Reply](#)

Anonymous • 12 mins ago

3   0

Great, now how is the average American youth going to get his daily recommended allowance of ammonia? We are going to raise a generation of ammonia deficient children!

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