

Beef Checkoff Supports New Food Safety Program for Restaurant Operators.

SERVSAFE, a new national food safety program aimed at helping restaurant operators train managers and employees in food safety practices, is being introduced by The Education Foundation of the National Restaurant Association and the National Restaurant Association. The Beef Industry Council (BIC) will fund the program.

"Consumer interest in food safety is high," says Daniel Gescheidle, foundation president. "In a recent survey, 89 percent of those responding indicated that proper food handling in restaurants is important to them and over half responded that food safety is very important. For 27 percent of those responding, cleanliness and food safety practices are a determining factor in choosing a restaurant."

The BIC, through checkoff investments from state beef councils, is sponsoring the meat division of the SERVSAFE program.

"As a sponsor and technical resource for the SERVSAFE program,

the Beef Industry Council food safety message will focus on proper meat handling, storage and preparation techniques," says Ralph Bell, chairman of the BIC Foodservice Subcommittee.

"Today, restauranteurs are much more concerned about food safety as it



relates to their operation," Bell says. "They believe, as does the beef industry, that they receive a safe and wholesome beef product from the industry."

The National Restaurant Associa-

tion represents about 70 percent of all foodservice establishments nationwide. Bell says, "The SERVSAFE program gives the beef industry an excellent and credible avenue to work with these foodservice operators to continue the commitment in providing a safe and wholesome beef product to the consumer."

Gescheidle adds, "We welcome the expertise and knowledge of sponsoring organizations like the Beef Industry Council. They bring to this program varied experience that broadens SERVSAFE's base and helps produce a high quality product that's fast becoming a national standard."

Foodservice efforts with the nation's restaurant industry are checkoff-funded programs. They are managed on behalf of the beef industry by the Beef Industry Council of the Meat Board, a federation of 44 state beef councils.

NCA Calls For Improvement in 'Lite' Labeling

The National Cattlemen's Association has called for the use of actual fat content in defining the term "lite" on retail meat product labels.

At present, under U.S. Department of Agriculture labeling regulations, the term "lite" is used only in a comparative way. A product may be called "lite" if its fat content is 25 percent less than the "standard" in the marketplace for that particular product. NCA says that such comparative definitions are not clear, may be based on standards that vary, and may be misleading to consumers.

Therefore, at their 1990 convention, NCA members adopted a policy resolution recommending that USDA redefine the term "lite" so that it refers to absolute and not comparative amounts of fat. The NCA resolution pointed out that USDA's standards and labeling division has said a label should convey truthful and non-misleading information. "Absolute" definitions of fat con-

tent, NCA said, more accurately meet the objectives of labeling than do "comparative" definitions.

Under the NCA proposal, a retail product could be labeled "lite" only if its fat content were no more than 10 percent — the same as required for the present "lean" label.

NCA also recommended that USDA create a new "extra lite" retail label. Fat content could be no more than five percent — the same as now required for the "extra lean" label.

Under NCA's proposal, a food supplier could use "lite" and "lean" interchangeably, and he could use "extra lite" and "extra lean" interchangeably.

NCA noted that consumers are not familiar with the fat content of "standard" products against which labeled products may be compared. Furthermore, depending on how closely external fat is trimmed, the fat content of "standard" retail beef cuts may vary. Therefore, at present, statements

about "lite" and about percentage reductions may be meaningless to most consumers.

Max Deets, Beloit, Kan., chairman of NCA's grading and labeling committee, said that if "lite" as well as "lean" were defined as a fat content of no more than 10 percent of a product's weight, consumers would know exactly what the term "lite" meant. He pointed out that numerous retail cuts of closely trimmed beef would qualify for the "lite" as well as "lean" label.

"The closely trimmed beef that now is available contains less fat and calories than many persons realize," Deets said. "The marbling in beef does not really represent very much fat in relation to lean tissue. Numerous cuts are now trimmed of most or all of their external fat. As a result, much of the beef that people buy really is lean' or lite.' Such beef can readily be a part of limited-fat diets."

