

TENNESSEE FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

2018 Policy Development



Lab Grown Meat

Issue

For years scientists at startup and established food companies have been working to develop a meat substitute in labs that looks and tastes just like meat from livestock. Though some are plant based products, much of the research has gone into growing meat cells from very small amounts of cells which originated from livestock. Products have been produced that simulate beef but did not go through the traditional cattle grow and harvest practices. Initial costs have been high to develop these products, but the costs of production have continued to decrease. The main discussions around this technology are what to call this new sector of products and who should regulate it. This budding industry is seeking a name such as “clean meat” whereas some in the traditional agriculture sector suggest “in vitro meat.” Both sides of the issue have other suggestions. The Food and Drug Administration has thus far claimed jurisdiction of regulatory oversight, but the USDA has signaled interest due to the department’s jurisdiction over plant based biotechnology. Once perfected, lab grown meat could be a huge disruptor to the current livestock sector.

Background

Scientists have been culturing meat in labs for years with the precise methods varying between many different companies venturing into this sector. The goal is to grow meat cells from very small amounts of cells which originated from livestock and taste just like the real beef, pork, chicken, etc. So far scientists have only successfully grown beef, but researchers are currently working on other lab grown meats as well.

Procedurally, scientists take specific types of cells once in livestock, and then activate the cells to start growing and reproducing as if the cells were still in a live animal. The scientists feed the cells nutrients by providing salts, sugars, and proteins. This process mimics what cells are constantly doing in living animals but is taking place in a laboratory.

Supporters of the science are embracing “clean meat” to describe the product. Other ideas of what to call the product by supporters include cultured meat, meat 2.0, safe meat, and pure meat. Opponents of the product question whether the product should even be called “meat,” much like the effort to not use term “milk” for non-dairy products. Opponents suggest terms like lab grown protein, meat byproduct, in vitro meat, or synthetic meat.

The Food and Drug Administration has thus far claimed jurisdiction of regulatory oversight, but the USDA has signaled interest as well. The FDA currently evaluates microbial, algal and fungal cells generated by large-scale culture and used as a direct food ingredient. This is their basis for claiming jurisdiction over the regulation of lab grown meat product. The USDA has expressed interest due to the department’s jurisdiction over plant based biotechnology and regulatory oversight of meat and poultry inspections which are the sole purview of USDA. Ultimately Congress may have to intervene to decide jurisdiction.

Questions

1. What should lab grown meat be called?
2. Should FDA or USDA have regulatory oversight?

Farm Bureau Policy

Food Safety (Partial)

The United States food supply is the safest, highest quality, most abundant and most affordable in the world. Farmers recognize a safe food supply is important to the integrity of the agricultural industry but most importantly to the well-being and health of the consumer.

With changing technology, the process of maintaining a safe product from the field to the table can always be improved. Policies and procedures that build trust and reliability in agriculture should reflect the latest in technology and research. Regulatory oversight should not impede the farmers' ability to produce. The risks versus the benefits should be considered in any food safety legislation or regulatory proposals. On-farm authority of government agencies should not be expanded. A trace back system should only be used to find and address the point of contamination, rather than simply be a punishment for producers and add costs. Quality assurance programs, research from agricultural colleges and education of food handlers throughout the food supply chain should take priority over expansion of the regulatory process. Increased costs to producers from on-farm inspections and standards should be a last resort of any legislative or regulatory initiative to improve food safety.

We oppose the legalized retail sale of raw milk of any kind in Tennessee.

Imported agricultural food products should meet the same sanitary and quality standards as domestic products and should be labeled by country of origin.

We are opposed to granting mandatory recall authority over meats to the USDA. USDA's current authority is quite sufficient to safeguard the wholesomeness of our meat supply. In the event of a produce recall by FDA, all efforts should be made to identify the source before any media release. Thresholds should be established to minimize negative impacts on producers.

Integrity in food labeling is a vital element in maintaining food safety. Food labeling requirements should remain a function of the federal government. We oppose separate state level labeling requirements of foods sold through interstate commerce. We support consumer friendly, science based labeling of agricultural products providing consumers with useful information concerning the ingredients, nutritional value and country of origin. Labels should not be required to contain information on production practices not affecting nutrition or safety of the product. Agricultural products produced using approved biotechnology such as GMO, GE, etc. should not be required to designate individual inputs or specific technologies on the product label. We oppose misleading labeling statements such as "bST Free Milk" implying food produced using certain production practices is superior and safer than food using other approved production practices.