



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food Safety
and Inspection
Service

Washington, D.C.
20250

FEB 12 2007

Ms. Wenonah Hauter
Executive Director
Food & Water Watch
1400 16th Street NW
Suite 225
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Ms. Hauter:

Thank you for your October 20, 2006, letter to former Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Administrator Dr. Barbara J. Masters regarding a press release about irradiated ground beef issued by the Wegmans grocery store chain. Dr. Masters had requested that I respond to your concerns.

While irradiation may reduce the numbers of bacteria present in raw product, the technology does not necessarily render it commercially sterile. There is always the potential for cross contamination and temperature abuse. Therefore, FSIS advises consumers that all raw ground beef, including raw ground beef that has been irradiated, should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit. As you noted, this message is stated in numerous FSIS publications aimed at consumers. The message is also conveyed through materials on our Web site, and it is the advice we give to consumers who contact the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline with questions concerning the cooking of raw ground beef or pose questions to "Ask Karen," the FSIS automated response system on our Web site.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. We have contacted Wegmans to let them know of our concerns with the inconsistency of their press release from August 13, 2006, "Some Like It Pink: Now Burger Fans Can Have It Their Way!," with our guidance.

We appreciate your commitment to food safety and consumer education. Again, thank you for writing, and I apologize for the delayed response. We are sending a copy of this letter to Ms. Judy Braiman, who also signed your letter.

Sincerely,

Terri Nintemann
Assistant Administrator
Office of Public Affairs, Education, and Outreach

cc: Ms. Judy Braiman
Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides
50 Landsdowne Lane
Rochester, New York 1418-3850